

'BEST OF' EAGLES AT FORUM: EAGLES AT FORUM

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pg. G1

'BEST OF' EAGLES AT FORUM

By ROBERT HILBURN

Times Pop Music Critic

The Eagles, whose songs often warn of corrupting influences, resisted a temptation of their own Saturday night in the band's first local appearance in more than three years.

Many rock groups returning home after a long absence would have brought along a truckload of special effects to make sure everyone realized it was an *event*. Fireworks, dancing girls and balloons aren't unknown at such occasions.

But the Los Angeles-based Eagles had the confidence and taste at the Inglewood Forum to rely on something more basic: its music.

That's not to say the quintet ignored the home-town angle. The band used murals for the first time on the tour to illustrate a few songs and singer-guitarist Glenn Frey playfully changed the lyric of "Take It Easy" from its traditional "Winslow, Ariz." to a more fitting Southern California.

The evening also was brightened when an admirer joined the group on piano for a Chuck Berry number during the encore: Elton John.

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Still, the heart of the concert was the music that made the Eagles the biggest-selling American rock act of the 1970s.

That repertoire, probably the most distinguished of any active U.S. group, ranges from such stylish ballads as "The Best of My Love" to rowdy celebrations like "Heartache Tonight" to the insightful social observation of "Hotel California" and "Life in the Fast Lane."

In easily the group's most satisfying local concert since its triumphant "Desperado" unveiling in 1973 at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, the Eagles also documented Saturday the reasons for its enormous appeal—including, frankly, one that it hadn't realized until this tour.

Midway through the band's two-hour set, a young fan in front of me leaned over to her female companion and said:

Please Turn to Page 6



Eagles drummer Don Henley plus guitarists Don Felder, bottom left, and Joe Walsh on stage at the Forum.

EAGLES AT FORUM

Continued from First Page

"Damn, they're cute. What's that guitarist's name?"



The Forum concert gave local audiences the first chance to see the band since Joe Walsh has been fully integrated into it.

When the Eagles last played here in 1976, Walsh was a question mark to many. How would the hard-rock guitarist from the James Gang and Barnstorm fit into the softer, more fluid style of the Eagles? Would he and Eagles guitarist Don Felder both have enough room in the band?

On Saturday, the answers were all positive. Not only did Felder and Walsh exchange stirring solos, but Walsh's own tunes, including the rousing new "In the City," also made the band more dynamic than before.

Bassist Timothy Schmit, who sings lead on the Eagles' new "I Can't Tell You Why" single, also made his first local appearance with the band and showed that the group hasn't been hurt by the departure of Randy Meisner.

The stars of the band, however, remain guitarist Frey and drummer Don Henley, who write most of the songs and sing most of the lead vocals. Henley has a raspy, character-rich voice that is ideal for the sense of struggle in the darkest Eagles tunes, while Frey's lighter style conveys nicely the gentler reflection in tunes like "Lyn' Eyes."

The Eagles aren't flawless. The new album, "The Long Run," contains some of the group's finest songs, including the anthemish title tune, but it also contains some of the band's least attractive numbers, including "King of Hollywood" and "Those Shoes." Both sounded as dour live as on record.

But the level of achievement is high. Like Elton John, the Eagles blends accessibility and artistry. In the changing parade of pop stars, few score well in both areas.

In reaching for striking persona or cult-binding originality, bands often forget that an essential part of rock 'n' roll is communication. The Eagles show that you can reach millions of people without sacrificing your artistry and vision. It's a point worth remembering.

Adding to the enjoyment Saturday was veteran rocker Roy Orbison, whose powerful vocals on such hits as "Only the Lonely" and "Oh, Pretty Woman" drew repeated "oohs" and "ahs" from an audience, much of which wasn't even born when Orbison started recording in 1956 in Memphis. Though best known for majestic ballads, Orbison also showed on upbeat tunes like "Mean Woman Blues" that he can still shake it up. It has been nearly 15 years since Orbison's last hit, but his voice is still in excellent shape. With everyone from Neil Sedaka to Bobby Vee rebounding on the charts in recent years, Orbison certainly would be a welcome addition to the airways again. The Eagles-Orbison bill continues through Tuesday.